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Economic and Social Council

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Statistical Commission
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Item 4 (i) of the provisional agenda*
Items for information: follow-up to Economic and Social Council policy decisions

Policy decisions of the Economic and Social Council that are relevant to the work of the Statistical Commission

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session (see E/2008/24), the present note is submitted to brief the Commission on policy decisions of the Economic and Social Council adopted in 2008 that are relevant to the work of the Statistical Commission. The note, furthermore, indicates the actions taken and proposed to be taken by the Commission and the United Nations Statistics Division, in an effort to respond to the requests made by the Council. The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

I. Follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

A. Action requested by the Economic and Social Council

1. In its resolution 2008/29 on the role of the Economic and Social Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits, in the light of relevant General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 61/16 (E/2008/L.29 and E/2008/SR.43), the Economic and Social Council reaffirmed the need to continue to strengthen the Council as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination and thus promote the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences in the economic, social and related fields, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Assembly resolutions, in particular resolutions 50/227, 57/270B and 61/16.

* E/CN.3/2009/1.

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2. In the same resolution, the Economic and Social Council also recognized the need to further enhance coordination and cooperation between the Council and its functional commissions, the regional commissions and other subsidiary bodies so as to allow the Council to carry out more effectively its crucial role as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination and encouraged the functional commissions to continue to explore ways to engage agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system more systematically in their work within their respective mandates, and requested that the functional commissions, the regional commissions and other relevant subsidiary bodies of the Council, in accordance with their mandates, as appropriate, contribute to the annual ministerial review and to the Development Cooperation Forum, in the context of their respective annual workplans, taking into account their specificities.

B. Actions taken and proposed by the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Statistics Division

Meeting of the chairpersons of the functional commissions with the Economic and Social Council

3. As mandated by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2006/44, a meeting of the Bureau of the Council with the chairpersons of the functional commissions is to be held annually in the early part of the year. The meetings of the chairpersons of the functional commissions with the Council and its Bureau serve to exchange relevant information among the subsidiary bodies and to intensify cooperation with the Council.

4. At the next annual meeting, which will take place in New York on Tuesday, 27 January 2009, the functional commissions are expected to provide input to the Council's 2009 annual ministerial review on the theme "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health". Those contributions, including that of the Statistical Commission, will be consolidated and circulated for discussion at the meeting. The contribution of the Statistical Commission will include its ongoing work in the field of health statistics, including the report on health statistics (E/CN.3/2009/10) which is before the fortieth session of the Commission. It will also comment on the challenges faced in the compilation of and reporting accurate and meaningful indicators in the context of measuring health policy goals, including those contained in the Millennium Development Goals.

5. Moreover, the Chairman of the Statistical Commission participated in a special Economic and Social Council round table event on the theme "The role of the Economic and Social Council in addressing violence against women in all its forms and manifestations: a dialogue with the chairpersons of the functional commissions" (8 July 2008). The Chairman briefed the round table that the Commission had formed a Friends of the Chair group in 2008 to conduct an in-depth technical review of indicators to measure violence against women in response to the proposal made during the meeting of the Expert Group on Indicators to Measure Violence against Women, held in Geneva, from 8 to 10 October 2007. On the basis of the primary technical role of the Commission to develop and improve standards and methods of official statistics, this Friends of the Chair group would also suggest ways in which the compilation of various indicators could be improved, for instance by proposing

more rigorous concepts and definitions or by developing appropriate sources, either administrative records or surveys. The Chairman further briefed the round table on technical problems related to the collection of reliable data on violence against women through surveys. Statistical challenges include the exact definition of concepts, the elaboration of the methodology to be used, the level of disaggregation by age, occupation, education, ethnicity and other social characteristics, and the classification of violence and its perpetrators.

Development indicators

6. Ever since the Economic and Social Council invited the Statistical Commission to serve as the intergovernmental focal point for the review of indicators used by the United Nations system for the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits (see Council resolutions 1999/55 and 2000/27), the Commission has been discussing the technical aspects of development indicators on a continuous basis.

7. At its fortieth session, the Commission is considering a report of the Secretary-General on indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals (E/CN.3/2009/16).

Methods of work

8. The Statistical Commission, like the rest of the functional commissions, had reported to the Council the completion of the review of its methods of work in 2005 (see E/2005/24). In particular, the Commission had addressed the issue of more efficient time management. It had also put in place a mechanism to ensure the continuity of its Bureau and cooperation with the Council, including through a standing agenda item on Council decisions. The Commission also enhanced its official programme through panel discussions and other side events during its thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth sessions with multi-stakeholder participation. The Commission has found the procedures satisfactory and it intends to continue to implement and refine them in its fortieth session. In particular, the Bureau has a continued mandate to streamline the agenda (see E/2007/24).

II. Multi-year programme of work for annual ministerial reviews of the Economic and Social Council

A. Action requested by the Economic and Social Council

9. The Council adopted its first multi-year work programme for the annual ministerial-level substantive reviews in October 2007. The 2008 review focused on the theme "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development"; and the 2009 review will focus on the theme "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to global public health". In its decision 2008/258, the Council also decided to adopt the following themes for its annual ministerial-level substantive reviews for 2010 and 2011: (a) 2010: "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women"; and (b) 2011: "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education". The substantive contributions of the Council's functional

commissions and expert bodies are considered essential for the success of the reviews.

B. Actions taken and proposed by the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Statistics Division

10. The Commission continuously works on all statistical subject-matter areas to improve the availability and quality of baseline statistics. For instance, the items of the provisional agenda of its fortieth session, on climate change and official statistics, environmental-economic accounting, health statistics and education statistics (items 3 (a), (d), (g) and (h)), are related to the themes of the annual ministerial-level substantive reviews for 2009, 2010 and 2011. Furthermore, as mentioned above (paras. 4 and 5), the Commission is the intergovernmental focal point for the review of indicators used by the United Nations system and accordingly guides the work of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goals Indicators, which could feed into the preparation of the annual ministerial-level substantive reviews.

III. Mainstreaming gender perspectives

A. Action requested by the Economic and Social Council

11. In its resolution 2008/34 the Council reaffirmed its agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system,[1] recalled its resolutions 2001/41, 2002/23, 2003/49, 2004/4, 2005/31, 2006/36 and 2007/33; and also reaffirmed the commitment made at the 2005 World Summit to actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres and to further undertake to strengthen the capabilities of the United Nations system in the area of gender.

12. In 2007, the General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women" (resolution 62/133). In the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts to develop and propose a set of possible indicators on violence against women, building on the work undertaken by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, in order to assist States in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women, with a view to allowing its consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-second session and by the Statistical Commission at the earliest.

B. Actions taken and proposed by the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Statistics Division

13. In March 2007, the Statistical Commission held a joint panel discussion with the Commission on the Status of Women on the latter's priority theme for 2007

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/52/3/Rev.1), chap. IV, para. 4.

entitled "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child". The panel discussion, which was part of the interactions between individual functional commissions, was very well received (see A/62/89-E/2007/76).

14. The United Nations Statistical Commission, at its thirty-ninth session held in February 2008 in New York, approved the formation of the Friends of the Chair group to conduct an in-depth technical review of proposed indicators to measure violence against women, and requested the group to report back to the Commission at its fortieth session.

15. The Friends of the Chair, comprising experts from seven countries with observers from several United Nations organizations, was formed. In consultation with the Chair, explicit terms of reference were elaborated. At its fortieth session, the Commission is considering a note by the Secretary-General on the report of the Friends of the Chair on the indicators on violence against women (E/CN.3/2009/13).

IV. Follow-up to Council resolutions on strengthening national capacity in statistics and on the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme

A. Action requested by the Economic and Social Council

16. Upon the initiative of the Statistical Commission, the Council adopted two resolutions in 2005 and 2006, one on strengthening national capacity in statistics (2006/6) and the other on the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme (2005/13), in which it requested an intensification of efforts to support national statistical programmes in strengthening their capacity, in the context of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census round and beyond.

B. Actions taken and proposed by the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Statistics Division

17. At its fortieth session, the Commission is considering specific follow-up actions to those two resolutions under its agenda items 3 (m) on "Development indicators", 4 (a) on "Population and housing censuses", and 4 (f) on "Statistical capacity-building". The documentation presented under those items describes in detail activities undertaken by the Statistics Division and by its partner agencies to improve the availability and quality of development indicators in supporting the 2010 World Population and Housing Census round and activities undertaken to improve the coordination of technical cooperation activities.

V. Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society

A. Action requested by the Economic and Social Council

18. In its resolution 2008/3, the Council recalled the outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society,[2] and recalled also that access to information and the sharing and creation of knowledge contributes significantly to strengthening economic, social and cultural development, thus helping all countries to reach the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals, considering that this process can be enhanced by removing barriers to universal, ubiquitous, equitable and affordable access to information, and underlining the importance of removing barriers to bridging the digital divide, particularly those that hinder the full achievement of the economic, social and cultural development of countries and the welfare of their people, in particular in developing countries. The Council, having assessed the successes and shortcomings to date in respect of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, recommended, inter alia, that the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communications Technologies for Development consider the creation of benchmarks and indicators, including impact indicators, for further consideration and decision by the Statistical Commission, in order to track progress towards the attainment of the specific goals and targets set out in the outcome documents of the World Summit on the Information Society, particularly section B of the Plan of Action adopted in Geneva.[3]

B. Actions taken and proposed by the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Statistics Division

19. At its thirty-eighth session, the Statistical Commission, in its decision 38/104, endorsed the core list of information and communication technology indicators (see E/CN.3/2007/5); encouraged countries to use the core list of indicators in their data collection programmes; encouraged the Partnership to continue working to improve and update the list of indicators, especially with regard to measuring the use of information and communication technology in education and in government, the contribution of such technology to economic growth and social development, and the barriers to the use of the technology; and encouraged the Partnership to assist countries in their capacity-building efforts for the collection of data for the information and communication technology indicators.

20. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has released its first Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Information Economy[4] to serve as a reference for national statistical offices and other producers of official statistics on business use of information and communications technology (ICT). The Manual provides a guide to data collection and analysis, international

[2] See A/C.2/59/3, annex, and A/60/687; the outcome documents are also available at http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html.

[3] Available at http://www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html.

[4] Available at http://stat.un.org/unsd/statcom_archive/ict_manual.pdf.

standards and definitions. It also offers model questions for surveys on ICT use and it reviews important institutional issues related to compiling ICT statistics. At its fortieth session, the Commission is considering a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communication Technologies for Development which summarizes the progress made to date (E/CN.3/2009/19).